

COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL, 1929  
(REVERSE)

Designed by Henry Dropsy

NICHOLAS ROERICH  
PAINTER AND PACIFIST

R. C. TANDAN



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(OBVERSE)

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THE ROERICH CENTRE  
OF ART AND CULTURE  
ALLAHABAD

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THE ARCHIVE OF  
NICHOLAS  
ROERICH  
MUSEUM

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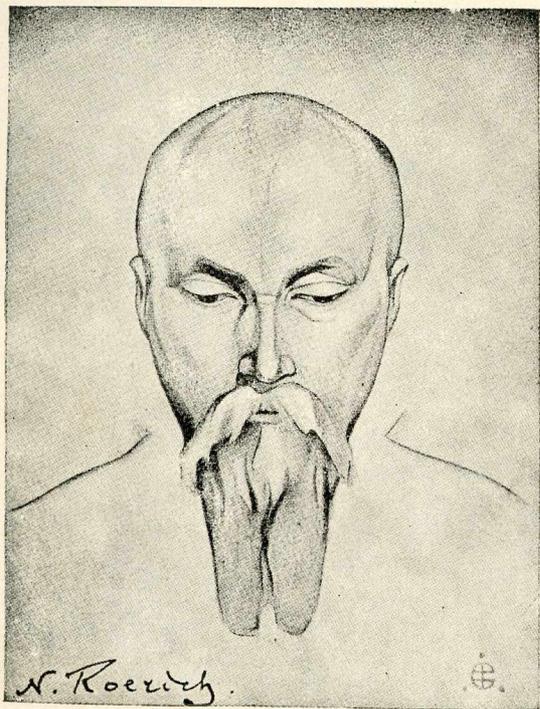
## PREFACE

This short monograph was prepared for the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Roerich Hall of the Municipal Museum at Allahabad and was read at the celebration meeting held on February 12, 1934, the Rt. Hon'ble Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru presiding. It is now printed for the use of a wider public.

R. C. T.

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NICHOLAS ROERICH  
( By his son Svetoslav Roerich )

*Frontispiece*

## I—INTRODUCTION

AMONGST contemporaries who have strenuously worked for the welfare and enlightenment of mankind, the name of Nicholas Roerich occupies a pre-eminent place. Scientist, philosopher, archæologist, artist and explorer, he has lived to create many reputations within a life-time. Thinkers all the world over, and lovers of culture have widely testified to the value and beneficence of his creative activities. Einstein, Maeterlinck, Andreyeff, Zuloaga, Itsuzo Takeuchi and a host of other outstanding personalities of the world have tendered praise alike for the beauty of his work and his great benevolence. In our own country Rabindranath Tagore, Chandrashekhar Raman, Jagdish Chandra Bose and Asitkumar Haldar have recognised the importance of his cultural mission

and offered him tributes of fellowship. For forty-five years Roerich has been engaged in his creative task and even today his enthusiasm shows no diminution in its keenness. Rather we find, in his latest works, evidences of an ever-evolving spirit and a truly progressive soul. Roerich's is a remarkable personality. We see in him a blending of the deep imagination of the East with the dynamic of the West.

Roerich's chief contribution has been in the sphere of art. It has been said that "Roerich is to Art what Einstein is to Science and Ford to Industry." An attempt to appraise the value of his art will be made elsewhere in this paper. What needs to be emphasised at the outset is that even in the sphere of art Roerich's genius has found such multiform expression and has been spread over such a long period of time that in a brief outline we can obtain only glimpses of a few milestones. For the artist has painted altogether

more than three thousand canvases which are scattered over the globe in nearly twenty-five countries, in hundreds of museums and private collections. More than a thousand paintings are exhibited in the New York Museum alone.

But whether we see these paintings in large numbers or small, we cannot fail to be greatly impressed by their wide range and catholicity and above all their lofty insistence on Truth. About these paintings the Poet Rabindranath Tagore expressed himself thus, in a letter to the artist. "Your pictures," wrote Rabindranath, "profoundly moved me. They made me realize one thing which is obvious, and yet which one needs to discover for oneself over and over again; it is that Truth is infinite. Your pictures are distinct, and yet are not definable by words. Your art is jealous of its independence because it is great."

## II—EARLY LIFE

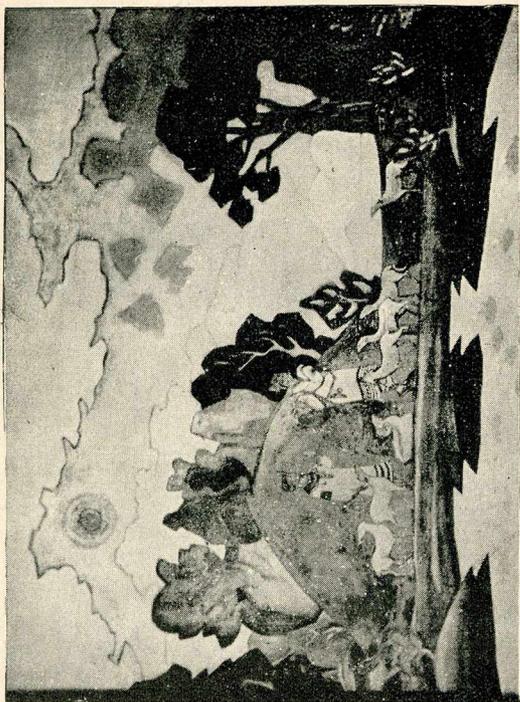
NICHOLAS ROERICH was born on October 10, 1874, at St. Petersburg in Russia. His father Konstantin F. Roerich was a noted barrister with a Nordic ancestry. His mother Marie V. Kalashnikoff came of an ancient Russian family of Pskov. Roerich's family according to genealogical data, originated from the Nordic Vikings, and the name of Roerich is found in old chronicles dating back to the tenth century. Thus the future artist was to combine in him the Nordic qualities of his paternal ancestry with the Russian characteristics of his mother's family.

Roerich's special style, which has become a by-word as well as a symbol for an entire school of art, has its source in the general character of the artist. Even in his early childhood, Nicholas

Roerich was already working in his unrepeatable, individual style, thus building up the foundations of his self-developed art.

When Roerich was ten years old, residing in his family estate of Isvara, he began to observe ancient kurgans or mounds dating from the Vikings and the pre-historic Slavs. The elders of the village had warned him against disturbing these relics. But the boy convinced of his way began personally to excavate them. He discovered exquisite bronze objects buried in these kurgans and presented the finds to the Archæological Society of his country. In this way, even in his childhood, the boy pursued his interests towards the beautiful.

At fifteen, already mastering the art of drawing and painting, he sent articles and drawings to illustrated art magazines which were accepted and published. Thus was begun the literary and artistic career of the artist. Hence, when the twenty-fifth



'THE HOLY SHEPHERD'  
(Municipal Museum, Allahabad)

### III—WORK IN AMERICA

IN 1920, the scene of Roerich's activities changes from Europe into America. His fame had already crossed the Atlantic, and he was in that year, invited by the Chicago Institute of Art to exhibit his paintings in the United States. In December of the same year, he exhibited his works at the Kingore Gallery in New York. His paintings then travelled and visited nearly forty of the most important cities of the United States, many young enthusiasts responding to his call of beauty and culture. An understanding and devoted group of Americans soon gathered round the artist.

At the termination of this tour, Roerich set about consolidating his conquest of the imagination of America by founding a number of art societies, prominent

SEVENTEEN

among them being the Master Institute of United Arts and Corona Mundi, the International Art Centre.

The Master Institute of United Arts was founded in November 1921. Arrangements were made to provide under one roof a great variety of faculties: painting, drawing, theatre, decoration, sculpture, music, literature, journalism, photography, to name only a few. Roerich has all his life been a great believer in small beginnings. Asked if it was possible to manage this vast enterprise under a single roof, he gave a reply which is characteristic of the man. "For the conception of creation," he remarked, "one does not need a room larger than the cell of Fra Angelico. Each tree must grow. If the work is vital it will develop; if it is destined to die, in any case it will have to die in one room." Time has shown that the seed so planted had the germs of growth in it. Already the beneficent activities of the Institute

have spread far and wide. The motto of the Institute, taken from Roerich's "Paths of Blessing" reiterates not only the high purpose of art in life but shows also the aspirations that have moved the artist in his creative work.

It reads: "Art will unify all humanity. Art is one—indivisible. Art has its many branches but all are one. Art is the manifestation of the coming synthesis. Art is for all . . . . Bring Art to the people—where it belongs. We should have not only museums, theatres, universities, public libraries, railway stations and hospitals, but even prisons decorated and beautified. Then we shall have no more prisons."

The other institution, Corona Mundi or the International Art Centre was founded in 1922. It holds exhibitions, arranges productions of lectures and concerts, encourages exchange of exhibitions between foreign nations, plans tours and loan exhibitions and generally sponsors move-

ments in every branch of art. Its motto shows the artist's conception of beauty as a great solvent of human problems.

"Humanity is facing the coming events of cosmic greatness. Humanity already realises that all occurrences are not accidental. The time for the construction of future culture is at hand . . . The sign of beauty and action will open all sacred gates. Beneath the sign of beauty we walk joyfully. With beauty and action we conquer. Through beauty we pray. In beauty we are united. And now we affirm these words—not on the snowy heights but amidst the turmoil of the city. And realising the path of true reality, we greet with a happy smile the future."

In 1923, the Roerich Museum was founded by the American institutions. It was opened in March 1924. The Museum is now housed in a 28-storied sky-scraper building in New York, which was completed and opened in October 1929. This

building, also now houses the Master Institute of United Arts and Corona Mundi, the International Art Centre. Further, it has in it the Roerich Museum Press and the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute, with a base in the Himalayas.

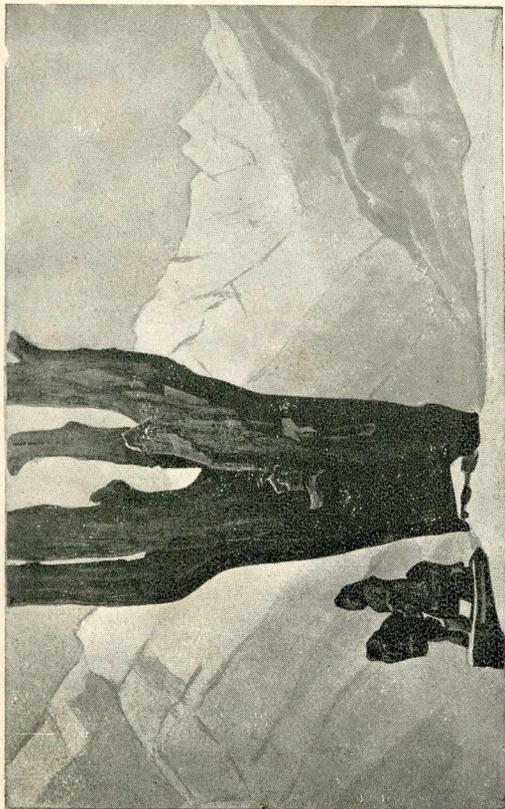
The American institutions have within hardly a decade become the leading cultural centres of the American continent. They have, moreover, radiated their cultural and educational activities all over the world, giving birth to numerous sister organisations and societies in the remotest corners of the world. There are today, more than seventy Roerich societies dotted over twenty-four countries and actively engaged in the furtherance of art ideals and culture everywhere. They are trying to bring art and culture at the doors of the people rather than confining them to museums and the theatre.

The Roerich Museum Press publishes besides the monthly Bulletin of the

*NICHOLAS ROERICH*

Museum, a number of important series of books dealing with art, archæology, natural history and folklore.

An extraordinary collection of magnificent paintings by Roerich, inspired by the life and natural scenery of Asia is lodged in the Museum.



'GUGA CHAUHAN AND NARSINGH'  
( Municipal Museum, Allahabad )

#### IV—AS AN EXPLORER

GREAT as Roerich is as a painter, he has shown himself no less great as an explorer. Soon after the foundation of the Roerich Museum of New York, the scene of his activity again changes and we find him engaged in the task of exploring Central Asia. In 1924, Roerich left America as the leader of the Roerich American Central Asiatic Expedition under the auspices of the Roerich Museum and some other American institutions. His purposes were to make a panorama of paintings of Asia which would transmute to the West the spirit of the East and to study the art and culture of Asia.

Since 1924, Roerich has been in India, Little Tibet, over the Karakorum Pass to Chinese Turkestan, across Mongolia and Tibet, thus completely encircling

the heart of Asia. The story of his travels may be read in books published by him and his learned son Dr. Georges Roerich. "Altai Himalaya" by Roerich (senior) and "Trails to Inmost Asia" by his son are outstanding contributions to the literature on Central Asiatic explorations. The expedition conducted into so little known regions of Central Asia has greatly added to our knowledge of those regions. It has, further, yielded remarkable artistic and cultural material in the shape of paintings manuscripts and other antiquarian articles.

The expedition was, nevertheless, fraught with danger. The members of the expedition were at one time held captive in Turkestan, at great risk of life, their arms confiscated, thus depriving them of means of protection. They were held up for five months in the mountains of Tibet at heights of 15,000 feet, under such terrific, climatic and physical hardships, that five members of the caravan

died and ninety of their caravan animals. The expedition had to traverse most dangerous regions, rife with robbers. More than once during the five years of his expedition, the newspapers "buried" Roerich in the absence of news for an extended period of time. Yet, in spite of all these obstacles, Roerich was able to complete more than 350 paintings—a veritable pageant of Asia, transmitting its natural beauties, its lore and legends. Equipped with the artist's eye and the philosopher's spirit as well as the scientist's experience, Roerich has been able to touch and understand, as could possibly no one else, the pulse of Asia, its beauties, its ancient cultures, and no less its hopes and prophecies.

During the last ten years Roerich has travelled greatly, not only in Asia but all over the world. During this decade he has crossed the Atlantic six times and the

Indian Ocean five times, encircled Inner Asia, covering many thousand miles through Kashmir, Ladakh, Taklamakan, Altai, Siberia, Mongolia, Tibet and back to India, crossing over thirty passes 15,000 to 25,000 feet high, bringing back endless masterpieces of the artistic achievements of Central Asia, besides much scientific data. He has, in addition, written several books, and numerous articles in different languages and helped in the founding of scores of centres of art and culture throughout the world. Truly an evidence of superhuman grandeur and creative achievement!

The books of past years by Roerich—"Flowers of Morya", "Adamant", "Paths of Blessing", "Altai Himalaya", "Heart of Asia", "Shambala", "Realm of Light", "Fiery Stronghold"—all express the unusually vast activity of this great genius.

The secret of all this vast accomplishment of the artist is to be found in his

own personality. Jean Duvernois, in his biographical fragments of Roerich, mentions the artist once having been questioned as to the time best suited for creative work. He smiled and said: "It is not bad on a little boat crossing the Neva; it is not bad in a street car or train. The movement even gives a sort of a rhythm." These are the words of a man who has drunk deep at the fountains of life and show us the very springs of his tireless energy. They also reveal the inspirational background of his paintings.

## VI—AS A PAINTER

THE number of Roerich's paintings is so large and they cover such a long period of time from the point of view of their creation that it is most difficult to form any comprehensive view of them. But competent critics, who have made a study of his art, are unanimous in the verdict that Roerich's place is not only supreme among the artists of Russia, but he occupies a deserved eminence among the artists of the world. Though Roerich belongs to Russia, his paintings do not follow any Russian tradition. He has been the creator of the special style known after him. Serge Ernst in his monograph on Roerich says: "In the history of contemporary Russian art, the individuality of Roerich in its contact with the last achievements and discoveries in the sphere,

THIRTY-TWO



'VYAS-KUND'  
(Municipal Museum, Allahabad)

stands out independently, original and perhaps somewhat unexpected." The Spanish painter Zuloaga is struck not only with the originality of Roerich's art but its great power. "Great artist!" he remarks, "Here is the evidence that from Russia is coming some force to the world. I cannot measure, cannot impart what it is, but it is here." Cortissoz, the American art-critic, says: "The essential charm of his art springs from the depth of imaginative power, its inventive fervour. . . . Roerich passes from dreams to realities and back again."

If the first quality of Roerich's paintings is their originality, the second undoubtedly is their universality. It is said of pictures that their language is universal. Roerich's paintings are stamped with universality not in this general sense. If one were to acquaint oneself only with the titles of his paintings, he will come to know that they belong to no one country,

community or race. His subjects are taken from all over the world. He has deep reverence for all the religions of mankind. The paintings made by him during his Central Asiatic Expedition, he has named as the "Saga of the East." Some of his other groups are known as "Banners of the East", "Wisdom", "Chingiz Khan", "Daughters of the Earth" and "His Country" series. A few titles from his "Wisdom" and "Banners of the East" series will show the universal character of his subjects. They are: "Fire Blossom", "Chintamani", "She Who Leads", "Burning of Darkness", "Mother of the World", "Buddha the Conqueror", "Signs of Christ", "Lao-Tse", "Moses, the Leader", "Padma Sambhava", "Muhammad on Mount Hira", "Confucius, the Just One" and "Nagarjuna, the Conqueror of the Serpent". All these paintings show the artist's deep insight and understanding of the different subjects treated.

The key to Roerich's universality is to be found in his spirituality. An art-critic has said: "Where his paintings inspire in some an admiration for the colours and forms, in others they become a source of spiritual thinking." Olin Downes writes: "Roerich's paintings are so great because of their affirmation, their great surety, in this restless day. His work reminds me of the expression of Renan, that 'all the world's reveries nestled around his heart.'"

Of his wonderful management of colours much need not be said here. He has been called a wizard of colours. The half-tone reproductions are entirely incapable of conveying the freshness and the surety of the originals. The National Historical Museum of Peking, in their address to Roerich, referred to his "ability to depict sounds and shadows." Other critics have pointed out a fourth dimensional quality in his works. Roerich has been able to

produce these effects undoubtedly because of the skilful combination of his colours.

Roerich's knowledge of technique is of the widest. He has worked in canvas, mosaic and fresco. He has experimented with a great variety and range of colours. Out of his vast experience as a painter he has been able to produce a combination for his use. But he is always eager to try new mediums and new methods, and during his travels in Tibet interested himself in the technique of Tibetan artists.

One point of supreme importance in connection with Roerich's paintings is their utterance of prophecies. There are people who are vividly interested in the question, what Roerich paints at the moment. For them Roerich's paintings are like indicating road-marks, like prophecies. In literature, relating to Roerich, it has been often pointed out that the paintings executed by the artist in 1913 and in the beginning of 1914 were of prophetic nature. Some students

of Roerich's art have ranged a list of titles from his works, from 1897 downwards to 1932, to show how at each step we find symbolical prophecies of coming world-events.

His recent painting of "Sancta Protectrix" as well as paintings of the Himalayas are said to indicate some impending world catastrophe and the fear caused in the mind of the artist on behalf of the valuable treasures of art and culture whose destruction is gravely apprehended by him. In order to ward off this danger Roerich has devised his famous 'Banner of Peace' and formulated his 'Peace Pact.'

The paintings of Roerich are for the most part symbolical. Their greatness lies in the fact that they teach us anew the age-old lesson of "the True, the Good, the Beautiful." The paintings, though they warn us against an impending peril, do not dishearten us. Indeed we find in them a great hope and affirmation. The peril itself is transitory and the Future is safe for the world.

## VII—HALLS IN INDIA

IT is a matter of sincere gratification that the United Provinces have been enriched by the possession of two Halls, at Benares and at Allahabad, dedicated to the artist, where masterpieces from the brush of Roerich are on exhibition. These Halls are the branches of the Roerich Museum of New York. At Benares, through the efforts of Rai Krishna Das, the Kala Bhavan has been able to obtain twelve canvases of the artist. At Allahabad, the same number of paintings have been made available for the Municipal Museum through the efforts of Pandit Braj Mohan Vyas. If we look at these canvases we can make an acquaintance with the style of the artist, for together the two collections form a fairly representative group of the more recent paintings of Roerich.

Some of the paintings at Benares are entitled as: "Star of the Hero", "Buddha, the Giver", "The Blessed Bhagvan", "Charaka", "Kalki Avatar", and "Maitreya". There are, besides, a series of impressions of the Himalayas and Tibet.

In the "Star of the Hero" we find in deep nocturnal tones the image of a boy, who watches with ardent enthusiasm a mighty meteor in the sky, the messenger of far-off worlds.

"Buddha, the Giver", painted in bluish purple sunset tones, gives a touching picture of the meeting of the Blessed One with a pilgrim.

"The Blessed Bhagvan" is dedicated to Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa and depicts the Lord carrying the symbol of "Om" from the snowy mountain heights into the distressed world.

"The Kalki Avatar" depicts in tremendously powerful tones the future Incarnation of God, who is seen rising in

majestic clouds above the Himalayan ridges.

"Charaka" is the well-known Ayurvedic healer. He is to be seen collecting precious medicinal herbs on the Himalayan heights. The picture radiates a remarkable blue.

There is a dramatic image of "Maitreya", the Lord of the Future, from Lahul or Western Tibet.

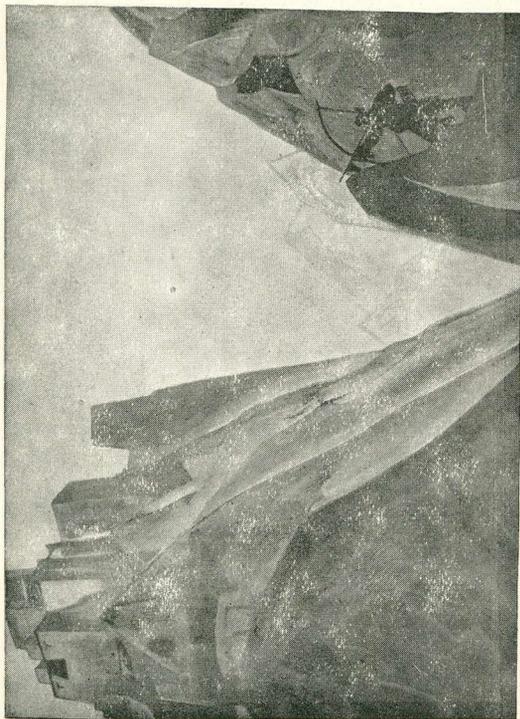
"Tri-ratna" in copper bronze tones, depicts the eternal legends of the wounded deer seeking refuge with a Rishi.

The Allahabad group of paintings is also, with a few exceptions, conceived against a Himalayan background. The titles include: "The Holy Shepherd", "The Message of Shambala", "Light Conquers Darkness", "Arhat", "Vyas-Kund", "Guga Chauhan and Narsingh", "Maitreya", and "She Who Leads."

"The Holy Shepherd" is Lel of the ancient Slavonic traditions. How very

much like our own Lord Krishna is Lel! With him are his two attendants Kupava and Snegurochaka, who seem to take the place of the *gopis* of Lord Krishna. There is a wonderful similarity between the two conceptions. Only in the place of cows we find sheep. The posture and the flute are alike in cases of the two. The richly variegated canvas presents an idyll of village life and the atmosphere of evening is present in the picture.

“Shambale Daik—the Message of Shambala” is entirely different from the earlier picture. The painting displays sunrise colours. An unknown messenger sends an arrow across an abyss to a mountain monastery, which is just touched by the rising sun’s rays. A message is attached to the arrow. In order to be able to paint such a picture one needs to have spent a long time in Tibet and to have acquired an intimate knowledge of its lore.



'THE MESSAGE OF SHAMBALA'  
( Municipal Museum, Allahabad )

*NICHOLAS ROERICH*

Benares group. On the mountain passes, surrounded by ice-cold winds are towering gigantic carvings of Maitreya.

"She Who Leads" directs the traveller towards heights symbolising spiritual ascents. The glaciers are of whitish emerald-sapphire colour. The rocks are already below. In the realms of snow and light this *Devi* leads the tired pilgrim and fills his heart with encouragement. Her lightly purple garments shine among the whitish green ice. The painting though smaller in size elevates by its composition.

As we view these paintings one after another our minds are filled by the glories of the Himalayas. We are also impressed by the mighty searching after Truth and an effort to realize the future which they symbolise.



'SHE WHO LEADS'  
( Municipal Museum, Allahabad )

## VIII—HIMALAYAN PAINTINGS

It has rightly been said of these Himalayan paintings of Roerich that they have not been excelled by works of any other painter in point either of skill or of panoramic variety. When we see such vast spaces—of land and sky—presented before us in an endless series, the very soul of the mountains seems to enter into our beings. There is, moreover, a spiritual covering clothing these paintings with meanings that ennoble our thoughts and fill us with longings.

Mr. Asitkumar Haldar has laid his finger on the right point when he has stated :

“The true vision of the Orient, as symbolised by the great Himalayas, has indeed been truly realized by one of the greatest creative seers of the world, the

Master Nicholas Roerich. He has indeed distilled the secrets of Nature and Humanity and has seen through the Veil—the Life Eternal. He has seen in life the exquisite *Anandam* born not of earthly things but of *Bhuma* or the Infinite. He may thus be called a storehouse of sublime contemplation and divine impulses—a spontaneous and vital force, imbibed with serious thought and culture.”

Those who know of Roerich's life and work will consider the tribute well merited.

Of the many passages that tell of Roerich's fascination for the snowy heights, here is one :

“All peoples know that the site of holy men is on the mountains, upon the peaks. From the peaks comes revelation. In caves and upon the summits lived the Rishis. There, where the rivers find their sources, where the eternal ice has preserved the purity of whirlwinds,

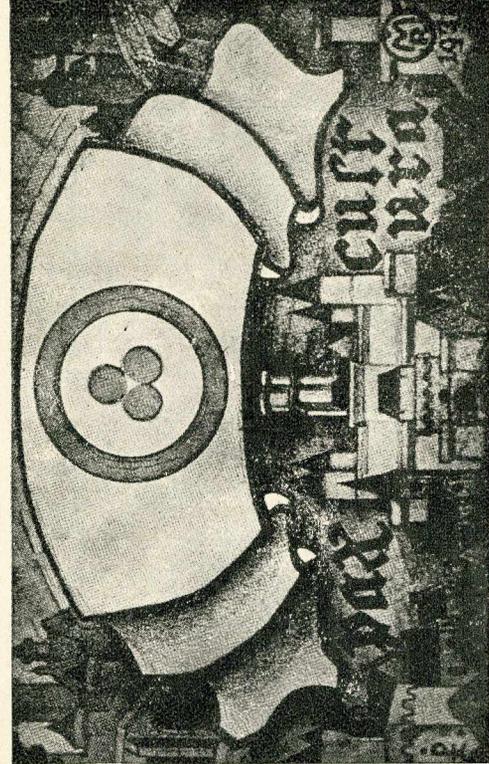
where the dust of meteorites carries a purifying armour from the distant worlds, there is the rising glow. Thither is directed the striving of the human spirit. By their very difficulty the mountain paths attract one. There the unexpected occurs. There the people's thought moves toward the Ultimate.”

In these lines of the artist we can find the source of the unending inspiration he derives from the Himalayas, he has painted in such wealth of colours, in all their gorgeous glory and sombre bleakness.

## IX—THE BANNER OF PEACE

No account of Roerich can be complete without a mention of his world-famous Banner of Peace. The artist's endeavours to secure peace in the world should properly be regarded as an extension of his artistic activities. The idea of protection of the cultural treasures of humanity had preoccupied him since the very beginning of his activities. As far back as 1904, addressing the Society of Architects and Artists in St. Petersburg, he had outlined his idea, calling attention to the tragic condition of many state monuments. His extensive travels to ancient monasteries and historical sites only affirmed for him the undeferrable necessity for urgent measures to protect cultural treasures. In 1914, when many historical monuments perished he made a report

FORTY-EIGHT



'THE ROERICH BANNER OF PEACE'

to the Grand Duke Nicholas. But War intervened and nothing tangible could be done. Finally, at the termination of the Central Asiatic Expedition in 1929, he proposed to the nations to establish a pact for the preservation of the treasures of the Art and Science of the world. This proposal was put into legal form by Dr. Georges Chlaver, Doctor of Laws, of the Paris University.

In 1930, the Pact thus formulated, was submitted to and unanimously approved by the Museum's Committee of the League of Nations at Geneva.

Roerich has devised a Banner of Peace which represents three spheres within a circle, in magenta colour, against a white background. The banner was devised as a means of protecting the world's treasures of culture in war and peace. The building on which the flag flies, is, in terms of the Pact, to be regarded as neutral territory and as such is to be protected by the belligerents.

Not only in times of war, but also in times of peace the necessity of protection of these treasures is great for innumerable such monuments perish every year through neglect or wantonness.

More than twenty nations have already signed the Pact and thus have definitely given a lead in the noble cause. Three International Conferences, dedicated to the promulgation of the Roerich Pact have so far been held and the cause of Peace is not only progressing but the progress fills us with hope. The first two Conferences were held at Bruges in Belgium in 1931 and 1932. The last conference was held at Washington in the United States in November last, and thirty-two nations of the world were represented at it either as signatories of the Pact or as Observers.

Roerich's faith in his mission of Peace is daily deepening, as will be seen from the following concluding passage from his message to the Washington Conference:

“Verily humanity is tired of destructions, vandalism and negation. Positive creativeness is the fundamental quality of the human spirit. In our life, everything that uplifts and ennobles the spirit must hold the dominant place . . . Be assured it is not a truism to speak about the undeferrable and urgent strivings of culture. . . . Let there resound once again the mighty prayer for Peace of the entire world. As the Red Cross affirms physical health, so may the Banner of Peace establish and affirm the spiritual health of mankind.”

## X—CONCLUSION

As has been indicated, every account of Roerich is bound to remain incomplete, not only because his creative work is so varied and rich and multiform, but also because he is daily adding to it and thus attaining to ever greater heights.

Claude Bragdon, the famous American writer says :

“In the history of fine arts, certain individuals have appeared from time to time, whose work has a unique, profound and indeed a mystical quality, which differentiates them from their contemporaries, making it impossible to classify them in any known category or to ally them with any school, because they resemble themselves only, and one another, like some spaceless and timeless order of Initiates. Such were Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt,

## CONCLUSION

Dures, Blake, and in other fields Beethoven and Balzac. Roerich, in his life, in his character and in his art, reveals himself as a member of this fraternity.”

Roerich has infinite faith in the Future. He writes :

“The future exists, that is why we have come here. Not for defamation, nor for terror, but we pass here for mutual labour, for knowledge, for enlightenment.”

The Future undoubtedly holds the reward. And it may be hoped that the seeds now sown by Roerich will in the fullness of time blossom forth into a harvest of flowers and redound to the glory of the sower.